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## A MEXICAN HOLD-UP.

BY OLD PADUKE.

Author of "The Liars' Duel," "Farleigh," "Should She Explain."

The stage from Trevino on the Mexican International R. R. to Monterey, on the Mexican National R. R., started for Monterey at 1 p. m. It was now 10 o'clock a. m. and the down train had just arrived at Trevino. The passengers who got off to take the stage route were a boy tourist and four German merchants. The day before the guard had given up his task and for the first time for weeks the stage was without protection. It was no use, as long as a guard rode with the coach no Domingues appeared. Trap them they could not, and fight them they would not, so the stage company gave notice that if a load of passengers could not protect themselves from two men then they would have to submit, as the company had done all they could be expected to do. It was stated that no more guards would make the trip except to protect valuable express matter.

This was the first time out and each one took his own risk. When this was known the passengers had a talk and concluded to ride, as the next train was 12 hours off and the stage short cut saved several hundred miles by rail to those who wanted to get back to the "States."

They would be due at Monterey at 6 p. m. and the north bound train left an hour later. After it was decided to run the gauntlet there was an examining of weapons. Among the travelers were produced three revolvers, and the boy had a 22 pearl-handled toy that he carried in his upper vest pocket. The rest of his outfit consisted of a roll of clothing in a blanket with a shawl-strap around it and a leather fishing rod case, with jointed rod, flies, lines, etc. At the other end he raised a little flap and pulled out some paper-backed novels. His entire unconsciousness of impending danger made the rest of the party feel sorry for him. His chalky white face, little deer of a mustache, light fringe of soft curls under a pith helmet, and calm, unconcerned grey eyes he spoke the Mama's boy out seeing the world before going into business. The driver spoke up and voicing the sentiments of the crowd advised him not to go.

"Why not?" the boy asked meekly.

"Well, I just see you in the hands of them Domingues. I guess they would eat you for their supper," replied the driver, with a wink at the other four travelers.

"Oh, I reckon not; not as long as I have this,"—and he patted the little 22-caliber.

"Oh, Wow! Did you hear that?" snapped the manipulator of the reins. "Let me tell you something, sonny. Now if you was to shoot me with that thing and I found it out I might slap you, see?" and he laughed uproariously at his own sally.

"No, I don't see," replied the artless one. "I believe I'll try if I can buy any curios in this town to take home to mother," and he marched off down the street with a manly swing.

"Well, gentlemen, what do you think of that?" demanded the Jehu, "and his ticket calls for a seat by the driver. If he falls off I can't help it, as I can't drive four horses and take care of a child at the same time."

In about an hour the boy came back to the office with his arms full of packages which he laid on the ground before the travelers. Then he got out his fishing combination, pulled out the sections of the rod, jointed them again and made imaginary casts. Then packed up everything, scratched himself, got up, sat down, asked questions, wanted to start on the trip right away and made himself a general nuisance. The contempt of the driver was ill concealed, but at last the time arrived, the horses hitched, the last instruction given, and the youth climbed up beside the driver with his case. A crack of the whip and they were off on the cross-country ride to Monterey, a long, dusty, up and down road with its beggars, naked children, mud hoes, cactus and grassy plains for scenery. When the journey was well under way the boy opened up with:

"Say, driver—"

"Don't call me driver; my name's Waddell, Sam Waddell."

"Well, Mr. Waddell—"

"Now, not Mister nothing, just Waddell."

"Well, 'Waddell,' I heard a man at the office say that if he was the driver he would not take that dude along un-

less he pulled a 'red order' on him. What's a 'red order'?"

"The man was about right. A red order from the company reads like this: 'Obey the hearer or lose your job.'"

"Isn't a ticket the same thing?"

"Now, it ain't the same thing."

"After a half hour or more of silence the boy broke out again with:

"Say Waddell, that's an awful hard-up town, that Trevino."

"Why?" replied Sam curtly.

"Because when I bought them things I went all over the town trying to get a \$50 bill changed, and I had to give up buying because no one could change it."

"You don't mean to tell me, you double dam fool! That \$50 bill will bring them Domingues down on us sure. So you've got money, have you, and you showed it to them Greasers?"

"I'm almost a mind to put you down ten miles from Monterey and make you foot it, that is, if we ain't stopped."

Sam mused awhile and made grimaces of disgust, then he resumed: "That settles it; don't say another word to me or I will lose my temper and slap you off this seat, and you will be run over and you won't see your Ma any more. Well, I'll be damned!"

Another silence followed, then the youth thought he would like to take a shot at a rabbit and announced his intention. He felt in his pocket for his 22,—it was gone!

"Picked your pocket and stole your gun; boys ought not to have guns any way," put in the irritated Waddell.

The boy seemed crushed by this misfortune and the avalanche of contumely heaped upon him, and spoke no more but amused himself looking about the country with his field glass. Shortly after changing horses at the half way house and when well under way, he became deeply interested and fixed his glass persistently in one direction. The driver's curiosity was too much for him.

"What do you see?" he condescended to ask.

"Oh, I can talk, can P. Well, it seems to be a circus or something, two men 'loping across the plain aiming just ahead. Both have blue cloaks on, big high hats and knee breeches, and the tails and manes of their horses are tied full of different colored ribbons."

"Domingues! I just knew some of their spies saw your money and they have been warned that a good thing is coming. I'll bet signals have been flying from every high point on the route all the afternoon." He pulled his horses up to a walk and called down to the drummers.

"Domingues just ahead! Get out your guns. It's four against two—I don't count the boy. Now show your hand. As for me, they don't want anything I've got and I am not going to get hurt. I can help it, and I give you fair warning."

He sat up suddenly and began to drive. "I'll say one thing for them Dons, you can agree with me that they give a fellow a show for his money with all those clothes and ribbons," continued Sam with a grim smile at his untimely joke.

"Where do you think they will stop us?" the boy questioned.

"You don't seem to be scared much."

"Me? No! This is fun and an experience I can tell about when I grow up. Where will they stop us?"

"About a mile ahead, as we run down this long slope and go up the next one. The horses will about be in a walk and then they will have you, and I am glad of it. Fun is it?"

When half way down the long slope the youngest fumbled in his pocket, pulled out a piece of paper and touched the driver.

"You know what this is?" he asked calmly.

"Dain if it ain't a red order!" exclaimed Sam in blank astonishment.

"Well, I'm McDonald the Wells-Fargo messenger," he went on quietly, "got up for those fellows benefit. We have got 'em dead to rights. That money showing did the trick, they are here and it is my business to wing 'em both."

"Why didn't you tell me long ago?" said Waddell with a hurt expression.

"Because I don't take chances with anybody in my plans. How do I know you are not in with them? Your stage has been robbed more than any other two in this section, so don't do anything suspicious for there are guns sticking out all over me and eyes in the back of

my head. Your talk to those inside shows why it is so easy to stop you."

After giving this little lecture he resumed: "And now you do exactly what I tell you, understand?"

"That I will, you are a good one." Then in an undertone, "Fooled me, smart Sam Waddell, and I poked fun at him and joshed him. Sam, you are a two-spot," with much disgust to himself.

"What's the drummers doing?" says Waddell, after catching his breath.

McDonald glanced below and laughed softly. "They are all lying flat on the floor of the stage; they are so white I expect they are senile; they can't be used to riding over rough roads."

"Aint you going to make them help you?"

"No, I want them to stay just where they are."

"Where's your gun?"

"Right here in this yellow case. It is a double-barreled, sawed-off shotgun, loaded with buckshot. Pulling them fishing rods in and out of the barrels was only a blind for you, old man."

"What do you want me to do? I am starting up the slope directly."

"Drive your horses in a walk up the grade. When you get near the top start them in a gallop, and as you go over drive them all they are worth. The Domingues will call to you to stop, but make out you can't hold your horses and keep them going. I'll tend to the rest."

"All right," said Waddell, settling himself and taking a fresh grip on the reins.

Down grade easy, up in a walk, then the whip and over the crest in a run. On each side of the road was a picturesque Domingues. Each held a repeating rifle—one leveled at the driver's seat, the other on the empty stage windows.

"Stop! Halt!" commanded the spokesman.

"Can't hold 'em," he shouted. In answer to Sam's halloo the horses rushed forward.

"Stop, I tell you," yelled the Mexicans, as they raced beside the coach.

"Can't hold 'em, I told you."

All this time the youth clutched his yellow case across his knees, a picture of abject terror. The desperadoes smiled. This hold-up was easy, no trouble from the boy, Sam with his hands full and the inside passengers out of sight.

"If you don't stop 'em we are going to throw the leader, called out the elder Dom to the driver."

Sam made no reply, but apparently labored in vain to control his horses.

"Throw the leader, Francesco," came the order.

Francesco sped forward, unbound his lariats and swung the long loop around his head ere he threw to catch the feet of the foremost plunging horse. The elder brother took his eyes off the boy and driver momentarily and the force was over. Quick and as unexpected as lightning from a clear sky, the yellow case went up—a flash and report, then the right barrel was turned across the now terrified horses backs and Francesco stopped, his hand riddled with buckshot.

McDonald threw out the empty shells, slipped in loaded ones and was ready, but it was not necessary.

Back in the road was the elder Domingues, dragging himself into the bushes, while his horse, full of shot, mad with pain, squealing, kicking and buckjumping across the country, his ribbons flying fantastically, his highly decorated saddle upside down.

In front was Francesco, rocking in his saddle, his horse jumping from side to side, till, with a plunge, he threw his rider heavily and started across the plain to join his companion in beribboned revelry.

"Shall we go back and get those two fellows, Mr. McDonald?" asked Sam, demurely.

"No, they will be sick a long time after this. It's my business to get back to the States before the news of this gets out." Then looking toward the still rearing stage horses, "I am mighty sorry I put some shot in the ears of those leaders. You won't have to use the whip any more."

"No, I don't believe I can hold them this time for sure," grinned Sam.

McDonald looked down into the stage through the peep-hole. The traveling men had not moved, all were white as paper. One of them glanced up, noticed the stage was still moving, saw the smiling face of the boy, and passed the good word that danger was over.

Instantly they were up and ready for war, but it was too late; they were not needed.

By the time the horses were checked up they were within a mile of the limits of Monterey. Shortly the horses were brought to a standstill, sweating and trembling.

McDonald jumped to the ground

quickly and ran to the door of the stage.

"Stop, gentlemen, don't get out, I want to ask a favor of you. I am the Wells-Fargo messenger and I think I have settled both the Domingues. Now I warn you not to say a word about this and take the train for the States as soon as the Lori will let you. If you but your eye or give a hint these Mexicans will throw you all into jail as witnesses and bring all kinds of criminal proceedings against us. You may be in jail twelve months before getting a hearing, and after you get out it means assassination at the hands of these men's relatives. If you should begin to kill them they would keep coming to the third and fourth generations, and when the men give out the women will start after you. If you want to do business in Mexico, don't say anything now or hereafter. Give me your word of honor you won't talk."

"We promise on honor. It is as much for our safety as yours."

"All right, let us be good every-day passengers."

Going back to the driver he swung himself to the seat and the stage started for town.

"Walk your horses," he commanded, "we don't want to get to the railroad station before train time.